

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA
Expressions of Prayer

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2

Insight

How cool was that? Justin's parents had finally given him a smartphone. He could use it to take high-quality photos, listen to music, and check his newsfeeds. He could map his location, get directions, and find the places he wanted to go.

As he became more and more familiar with its functions, Justin realized that he simply could not be without his smartphone. He took it everywhere and used it in a variety of ways. It was so convenient that he could not imagine being without it. But most importantly, Justin could use his phone to stay in touch with his parents and friends throughout the day.

He was mildly surprised when his parents got the phone for him. But he knew they wanted him to stay in contact with them when he went to college in the fall. Once at college, Justin sent and posted lots of photos of the campus, his dorm, and new friends. Justin also made sure to call his parents on a regular basis.

For Reflection . . .

Jesus intercedes with the Father for us.

What are the different ways in which you express yourself to the most important people in your life?

Do you feel as if God hears your prayers?

Church Teaching

Christian tradition holds that there are three major ways we express ourselves in prayer: vocally, meditatively, and contemplatively.

Vocal prayer is prayer that uses the voice. We speak (or sing) the prayer aloud. Vocal prayer most lends itself to communal worship in the liturgy. Everyone during the liturgy can participate in vocal prayer, either in unison or by turns, such as in litanies or when psalms are sung antiphonally. Vocal prayer lifts our hearts and minds to God and strengthens our bonds with one another.

Meditative prayer focuses on something outside the self, such as a portion of Sacred Scripture or religious writings, an icon, artwork, a piece of music, or something beautiful in creation itself. The purpose of meditation is to stir the imagination and the heart as we are lifted up to divine realities. In meditation, the person seeks to discern the will of the Lord and to understand where God is leading us. Meditation requires an attentiveness born in quiet, and its fruit is the deepening of conversion and conviction.

Contemplative prayer, the most challenging of the three, seeks to lose the self in the Beloved, God. Contemplation is an intense form of concentration that can begin with a focus on a text or an icon. Eventually the contemplative person ascends to God himself. The goal in contemplative prayer is that there be no "masks" between the person and God. It is as if one "falls away from self" and into the Lord. Contemplation begins with one's efforts but ultimately is a gift, a grace from above to which one humbly surrenders.

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2697–2745

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 473–475

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 568–575